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## **Managerial career development in a developing host-country context: a study of American multinationals in Pakistan**

### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the uptake of distinctly Anglo-Saxon protean and boundaryless careers in the specific organizational context of foreign multinationals operating in a culturally and institutionally distant developing economy. A qualitative case study approach is applied to two American subsidiaries operating in Pakistan. Findings reveal that these ‘new’ career concepts often coexist with, rather than replace, features of traditional, organizational careers both reflecting, and responding to, changing and dualistic individual, organizational and institutional values. Therefore, this paper suggests that all these three levels of analysis need to be considered in conjunction when analysing managerial career development in developing host countries.

### **Keywords**

- American multinationals,
- boundaryless careers,
- developing host country,
- host country nationals,
- managerial career development,
- protean careers

### **Introduction**

A lot of theoretical and practitioner interest has been generated by the rise of popular career models such as boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau 1996), protean (Hall 1976; Hall, Briscoe and Kram 1977; Briscoe and Hall 2006), kaleidoscope (Mainero and Sullivan 2006), post-corporate (Peiperl and Baruch 1997) and portfolio careers (Handy 1996); collectively seen to represent the ‘new’, ‘contemporary’ careers. This paper considers protean and boundaryless careers that represent *ideal career types* promulgated in response to technological, structural and societal flux (Inkson 2006). Butler, Collings, Peters and Quintanilla argue that a *specific* range of internal and external influences (such as organizational restructuring,

pressures for numerical flexibility, ascendancy of shareholder value and a more market-mediated employment relationship) precipitated the demise of 'previously durable ties between employers and employees' (2006, p. 175), and gave rise to these 'new' careers. Since these developments primarily took place in the Anglo-Saxon context there is scope for considering these models in different organizational and institutional domains.

It is interesting to explore whether multinationals (MNCs), credited with cross-border transfers of HR policies and practices (Rubery and Grimshaw 2003; Edwards 2004), facilitate the implementation of these Western career concepts and to what *extent* these models are then embraced by host-country managers. Many senior managers and executives have been found to be resistant to change in existing career structures (Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth 2006) and many MNCs still have large bureaucratic structures despite restructuring, increasing business pressures and global outreach (see Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989; Harzing 1996; Ferner 2000 on continued existence of bureaucratic control mechanisms in MNCs). Therefore, while MNCs have the capability (and the competitive economic rationale) to transfer these notions of self-directed careers, the implementation process might be quite problematic if organizational structures, power relations and senior management attitudes are slow (and even reluctant) to respond in kind.

Finally, the implementation of these career models in institutional environments with different local norms, social structures and economic context (Briscoe and Hall 2006) is likely to give rise to very diverse patterns of career development. Therefore, considering these careers in the context of Pakistan has considerable research promise. First, since HRM in the developing/emerging country context has been under-explored in management literature (Jackson 2004), there is a need for a shift in research focus from the consideration of formal, developed and mature markets to emerging, culturally distant markets such as Pakistan. An attempt to redress this literature gap, by considering the case of Pakistan specifically, could also offer useful insights, regarding HRM in general and managerial career development in particular, for a wider range of emerging economies which are more likely to share similarities in historical, religious, economic and political conditions (Debrah and Budhwar 2001) with Pakistan than commonly researched Western economies such as the US, the UK and Germany.

More importantly, the receptiveness of a developing country such as Pakistan, and the applicability of Western ideals in its specific societal and institutional environment, needs to be explicitly problematized in view of the institutional and cultural distance

(Hofstede 1980, 1991; Kostova and Zaheer 1999; Kostova and Roth 2002) from advanced capitalist economies. Since the application of Western management techniques in developing countries can result in a serious conflict of values (Jaeger 1990; Jackson 2004), introduction of ‘new’ career concepts in Pakistan will not only be more interesting because of the contextual contrast involved, but can also offer wider comparative lessons for MNCs with vested interests in emerging markets.

Given these different levels of analysis and associated literature gaps, consideration of ‘new’ careers in the context of American MNCs in Pakistan necessitates exploration of three distinct literature strands. First, protean and boundaryless careers are explored and defined in greater detail and directly juxtaposed to the traditional, organizational career. Second, evidence on the influence of organizational characteristics on MNCs' internal labour markets (ILMs) is assessed. Finally, the key societal and institutional factors that shape Pakistan's managerial labour market are identified.

### **Individual employees' career orientations: ‘new’ versus traditional careers**

The two most popular career models advanced in literature are the boundaryless and protean concepts that focus on the individual employee's career, encompassing his/her physical and psychological career boundaries as well as objective *and* subjective career goals. Hall's (1976) and Hall et al.'s (1977) concept of protean careers emphasized the self-reliant mindset of an individual employee towards his/her career (Briscoe and Hall 2006) and the importance of personally defined goals within a more holistic, values-driven approach to life (Hall 2002), where psychological success often took precedence over objective success (such as increments in pay, rank or power; Hall 2002). On the other hand, Arthur and Rousseau envisioned boundaryless careers as work experiences over time and across different employer boundaries, sustainable without organizational support, bolstered by external networks and communities, defiant of traditional organizational career hierarchies, involving a different work–life balance and most importantly the *perception* of a ‘boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints’ (1996, p. 6). This definition invoked individual agency and mobility across both physical and psychological boundaries (Sullivan and Arthur 2006) whereby the former involved transitions across different jobs, organizations, occupations and even countries, while the latter focused on employee ‘perception of the capacity to make transitions’ (p. 21).

However, subsequent research primarily envisioned boundarylessness in terms of physical inter-organizational mobility. In order to consider the often-neglected psychological boundary-crossing, individual conceptualization of careers this paper will consider Sullivan and Arthur's (2006) broader range of career boundaries, including the potential for inter-country movement. This more flexible understanding of boundarylessness will help highlight employees' perceived capacity and range for career mobility as well as the extent to which these perceptions can, and are, translated into actual physical mobility (based on MNCs' organizational reality which is explored in the following section). It is important to incorporate employees' psychological perceptions of geographical mobility in particular because researchers have argued that in an increasingly globalized economy managerial employees enact individual agency across multiple career contexts (Tams and Arthur 2010) because the boundaryless career 'has taken on new characteristics that broaden its applicability to global careers beyond the simple study of expatriates' (Thomas, Lazarova and Inkson 2005, p. 342). This highlights an existing gap in career theory to consider career concepts such as the boundaryless phenomenon within what Banai and Harry identified as the 'international milieu' (2004, p. 98). Thus, there is a need to acknowledge the changing, geographically expansive, aspects of career mobility (Cappallen and Janssens 2005; Inkson and Thorn 2010) and employees' reactions to these changes in terms of physical and psychological career mobility.

The protean and boundaryless careers represent the 'new' alternatives to traditional careers which viewed career development from an organizational perspective as the responsibility of the employer, achieved by ensuring job security and progressive, hierarchical movement along a well-defined career ladder (Pringle and Mallon 2003; Granrose and Baccili 2005). This historical understanding between the employer and the employee meant that in exchange for security and promotion employees promised performance and loyalty (conceptualized as working for a limited number of organizations over a lifetime; Waterman, Waterman and Collard 1994). However, researchers have argued that in reality the work environment and organizational structures have not changed to the degree supposed in 'new' careers research. Protean and boundaryless careers can serve as useful functional metaphors that highlight the change in employees' *perception* of their career boundaries as increasingly porous and demanding greater individual rather than organizational decision-making (Inkson 2006). However, as Granrose and Baccili have argued, the 'characteristics of a traditional psychological contract, job security and mobility up the career ladder are still important ...'

(2005, p. 176), and the purported demise of traditional, organizational careers is considered by some as mere rhetoric (Guest and Davey 1996; Jacoby 1999).

Second, while inter-organizational mobility might have become much easier, movement across other boundaries (e.g. occupational, industry) may have become more limited (Currie, Tempest and Starkey 2006; Inkson 2006) resulting in the creation of 'functional chimneys' (Butler et al. 2006) and increased employee orientation towards specific occupations (Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Currie et al. 2006). Therefore, to have a more realistic understanding of the changing nature of careers, Inkson's 'boundaries between organizations, between occupations, between industries and between work and family' (2006, p. 55; and in the case of MNCs even geographical boundaries) all need to be considered in conjunction to get a true picture of mobility.

In view of the influence boundaryless and protean career concepts are exerting on existing and forthcoming careers research, it is important to highlight the restricted nature of their application. Pringle and Mallon (2003) and Currie et al. (2006) specifically highlight that the popular notion of changing career boundaries has only been investigated on a narrow cohort of employees and occupational contexts, with the focus on smaller start-ups in newer industries such as the film industry, the Silicon Valley IT industry and the biotechnology industry, often ignoring large, bureaucratic MNCs. This is perhaps why a review of existing 'new' careers research highlights the constant appeal of researchers to widen the field of application and consider different factors such as gender, culture and differences in individual opportunities due to variations in educational backgrounds, skill, competencies, etc. (Sullivan and Arthur 2006), different contexts such as non-Western and non-Anglo cultures (where the boundaryless and protean metaphors and associated aspects of individualism, opportunity and agency hold different cultural value; Briscoe and Hall 2006), and a more comparative approach to the study of careers across international and cultural boundaries (Arthur 2008).

### **Career development and the organizational backdrop of multinationals**

Consideration of an MNC's *international* ILM reveals differences in career opportunities, pace and scale of progression and resultant career expectations of home-, host- and third-country managers. The traditional approach to understanding these differences was to highlight variations in the organizational strategies (Edstrom and Galbraith 1977; Reiche and Harzing 2011) and structural characteristics of different MNCs. Therefore, Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) MNC, Perlmutter's (1969) *polycentric* firm and Porter's (1986) *multi-*

*domestic* approach referred to independent national subsidiaries with minimal interference from the headquarters (HQ). Such a decentralized strategy, with the focus on local adaptation, limited the use of expatriate managers and developed host-country managers for key decision-making roles limited to the subsidiary level (Edwards & Rees 2011). On the other hand, the *global* centralized hub (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989) corresponding with an *ethnocentric* orientation (Perlmutter 1969) was based on a strategy of global integration and standardization. In career development terms home-country managers would be offered international careers and deployed across the organization's worldwide operations to enforce HQ policies (Edwards and Rees 2011). Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) *international*, coordinated federation was based on the dual strategy of worldwide integration *and* local responsiveness, whereby expatriate managers played the role of 'facilitators' (Edwards and Rees 2011). However, responsibility was also devolved to local managers to implement the centrally developed policies after receiving international exposure and acculturation with HQ orientations and home-country values (Reiche and Harzing 2011). Finally, the *transnational* firm (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989) exhibiting *ageocentric* orientation (Perlmutter 1969) would be focused on the strategy of indiscriminately developing a cadre of international managers from everywhere in the world for key positions across its international operations (Edwards and Rees 2011).

However, despite different MNCs having very different staffing orientations (Perlmutter 1969; Heenan and Perlmutter 1979) and very different views on how to reconcile the competing organizational demands of achieving global integration and local responsiveness (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989; Rosenzweig and Nohria 1994; Ferner and Quintanilla 1998), international and comparative HRM research rather than considering the *relative* use of home-country versus host-country managers (and the associated impact on their respective careers) has tended to treat career development from a distinctly expatriate point of view (Dowling and Welch 2004; Scullion and Collings 2006; Woodall 2006).

These expatriate managers were seen to enjoy globally strategic job roles (Debrah and Rees 2011), highly competitive compensation packages (Burnett and Glinow 2011; Vernon 2011), and tailored training and development programmes (Debrah and Rees 2011). However, Woodall argues that this picture of a relatively strong ILM for expatriate managers has, in the past few decades, suffered at the hands of downsizing, outsourcing, growing ascendancy of technical and professional staff, expansion through mergers, acquisitions, alliances and joint ventures, and MNCs' foray into emergent (and in terms of relocation –

often unattractive) markets and therefore, ‘the “job-for-life” culture of many organizations has ended’ (2011, p. 166). These developments in the ILMs of MNCs have key implications for the managerial careers of home- *and* host-country managers (as well as for the study of managerial career development in MNCs).

First, perhaps in response to these changes, expatriate managers' career orientations have undergone a shift from pursuing career advancement within their employing organization (Miller and Cheung 1978) to focusing on greater learning and personal development to increase their overall employability in the *external labour market* (ELM; Tung 1998; Stahl, Miller and Tung 2002; Collings, Scullion and Morley 2007). Expatriates also display greater willingness to look for alternative employment opportunities after repatriation (Moore 2006). Moreover, international assignments have changed considerably from long-term transfers to relatively greater use of medium- to short-term alternatives (Forster 2000; Collings et al. 2007; Reiche and Harzing 2011). This shift in the *nature* of international assignments, combined with consistent concerns regarding the failure of expatriation (Reiche and Harzing 2011), means that international assignments are no longer the sole preserve of the traditional home-country expatriate managers. Since developing global leaders is a predominant organizational concern (Suutari 2002, 2003; Debrah and Rees 2011; Moore 2011), MNCs no longer focus exclusively on home-country managers and the development of host-country nationals' global leadership potential is also being explored (Stroh and Caligiuri 1998).

With host-country nationals increasingly being considered as suitable alternatives for undertaking international assignments, ILM conditions at the subsidiary level and their impact on career aspirations and career behaviours need to be explored. As Tarique and Schuler (2008) and Vo (2009) attest, there is little research currently available that attempts an empirical investigation of host-country managers; and even less that focuses specifically on managers in developing countries such as Pakistan. Existing research does, however, highlight that MNCs in developing countries offer managers premium wages that are higher than local firms (Matsouka 2001) to attract the best employees (Jain, Lawler and Morishima 1998; Ratnam 1998). There is also evidence of changed employee preferences for more immediate returns such as higher salaries and continuous learning rather than long-term rewards (such as promotion prospects and job security) that have given rise to the phenomenon of job-hopping within developing host environments (Gershenberg 1987; Gamble 2008; Demirbag, Mellahi, Sahadev and Elliston 2012). Since local managers with the



appropriate skills and education level are a 'small social elite', MNCs' scope for indigenous recruitment is severely limited in developing countries (Buckley and Casson 2010), forcing them to wage a war for the best managerial talent (Vo 2009) while caught in a pervasive cycle job-hopping.

### **Institutional and societal influences on Pakistan's managerial labour market**

Ferner and Tempel's (2006) approach of incorporating two main strands of institutional theory, that is comparative institutionalism and 'new' institutionalism, is adopted. First, comparative institutionalism (Hall and Soskice 2001; Rubery and Grimshaw 2003; Coates 2005; Allen 2006) is used to identify the key interlinked macro-level institutional influences such as the labour system (i.e. education system and industrial relations), the political system (the role of the state) and the cultural system (encompassing trust, authority relations and collective identities; Whitley 1999) that directly impact Pakistan's managerial labour market.

Pakistani economy's agrarian focus means that the managerial labour market is quite small and that institutional arrangements create very distinct ELM conditions for managers. Inequalities in the provision (and quality) of education (Andrabi, Das and Khwaja 2002; Saeed 2007) have created an elite urban minority that is able to take advantage of the best higher educational and employment opportunities (Nasir 2005; Saeed 2007; Asadullah 2009). Their privileged educational background (tied to family status and financial resources) and low supply translates into significant competitive advantage in the ELM (Nasir 2005; Bashir and Ramay 2008). Since organizations are competing with each other to recruit the best talent by offering greater incentives (Rahman, Naqvi and Ramay 2008), these elite workers are frontline contenders for the coveted jobs in foreign subsidiaries in particular and can exert considerable influence because of their strong position in the ELM and influential family connections. In the light of these features, Pakistan can be compared to Whitley's *particularist* business environment exemplified by a 'weak and/or predatory state', 'paternalistic authority relationships' and unreliable institutions (2001, p. 39).

Second, 'new' institutionalism (Kostova 1999; Kostova and Zaheer 1999; Kostova and Roth 2002) is applied to highlight cognitive and normative structures that influence Pakistani managers and their employers. In particular, key social values are considered within the MNC context (including the transfer of practices to host institutional environments; Kostova and Roth 2002). This approach corresponds with DiMaggio and Powell's (1983, cited in

Farndale and Paauwe 2007) notions of competitive and institutional isomorphism, where the former focused on organizational rationality in competitive, free markets and the latter highlighted coercive, mimetic and normative pressures on organizations stemming from political pressures, imitative responses to market uncertainty, and cultural and societal expectations, respectively. Tayeb argued that Pakistan's social, political and economic institutional arrangements have 'their origins in national culture...' (1995, p. 590). Khilji's (2001, 2003a) understanding of this national culture highlighted the coexistence of several influences – (1) the religious influence of Islam (and its symbolic and/or political use in socio-economic systems); (2) the lasting impact of Indian origins (and associated customs and traditions such as a family-centred set-up and tacit acceptance of authority); (3) the colonial legacy of the British Raj (credited with the creation of elite classes, disproportionate distribution of power, wealth and status and importance of *guanxi*, i.e. connections); and finally (4) American influences (as a result of foreign policy intervention, influx of American capital, movement of human resources between Pakistan and the US, and the increasing popularity of American educational and managerial styles).<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly these factors have had a dual impact on societal norms and how they influence corporate cultures and organizational behaviours (Rieger and Wong-Rieger 1990). On the one hand, an enduring deferential culture reflects employees' traditional values pertaining to religion and family structures. Khilji corroborated Hofstede's (1980, 1991) research by arguing that managerial values in Pakistan signified 'a general unquestioning respect for authority, people are integrated as cohesive groups, and they have an external locus of control' (2003b, p. 142). Eldridge and Mahmood's (1993) study of Pakistani public-sector organizations also highlighted that employees preferred an authoritative style of management and a sense of 'communal belonging' which the authors attributed to the cultural and symbolic significance of the extended family. The impact of these societal norms on organizational structures in Pakistan is exemplified in the continuing existence of traditional bureaucracies (Rieger and Wong-Rieger 1990), well-delineated (and several) hierarchies' levels (Eldridge and Mahmood 1993), centralized authority, low employee autonomy and initiative and limited communication across both state-owned and private organizations (Gill 1998; Bashir and Ramay 2008; Iqbal 2008).

On the other hand, there is also an observable trend towards change, particularly as a result of American influences. Khilji has argued that 'a decade of deregulation, increased globalization and economic hardship' has increased the likelihood of a change in employee values (2003b,

p. 142). Employer–employee relationships and employee career objectives are more individualistic (*and* materialistic), while the more collectivist, socially sanctioned, traditional values learned through early socialization are increasingly confined to social and personal spheres (Khilji 2001). MNCs (under intense global competitive pressures) have introduced more *progressive* corporate cultures in Pakistan that might have initiated a process of transformation within certain national organizations as well (Khilji 2004).

The coexistence of these twin forces of continuity and change have created a duality in managerial values, whereby traditional social and cultural values are incorporated alongside more modern, Western notions of management (Khilji 2002, 2003a,b). Therefore, on the one hand, some private-sector organizations (mainly large national and foreign enterprises) have witnessed an increase in autonomy and employee discretion, a much smaller power distance and a lower degree of uncertainty avoidance (Khilji 2003b). However, this change in managerial values and corporate cultures is not symptomatic of the entire workforce and has relevance only for the younger, highly skilled employees, with early and sustained exposure to Western education and management ideals and employed primarily in private-sector organizations (Khilji 2003b).

## **Methods**

To explore the career orientations of young Pakistani managers working in MNCs two American subsidiaries were chosen as case studies to highlight the institutional disparity between the home and host environments. This is an interesting research endeavour because of extensive and sustained US involvement in Pakistan and American dominance across Pakistan's political, economic and even cultural spheres of influence. However, while MNCs with the same country of origin were selected to limit home-country influences, a decision was made to choose two very different MNCs both in terms of the industry/sector and their overall managerial orientation (based on Perlmutter's (1969) classification) so that the interplay of employee, organizational and institutional factors would allow both a confirmatory and a comparative analysis. Research was conducted in an American bank (Bankco) and an agro-chemicals corporation (Chemicalco; see Table 1) chosen to reflect theoretical rather than statistical sampling (Yin 1994) *and* to accommodate access concerns. Bankco, operating in Pakistan since 1961, has been instrumental in developing new products and services, identifying new market needs and pioneering innovative technological efficiencies in the Pakistani banking sector. Chemicalco has also had a presence in Pakistan

for a few decades and has over time specifically targeted the agricultural chemicals sector (producing insecticides, herbicides and fungicides) and is now one of the major market players in the Pakistani chemicals industry.

Since this research was part of a bigger project, the interviews sought to explore broader themes such as recruitment and selection, mobility and job quality (including training and compensation) to understand corporate management development in foreign MNC subsidiaries. A comparative juxtaposition of the two MNCs across these different HR policy areas (see Table 1) highlights some very interesting differences in HR strategy in general and organizational approach to individual employees' career development in particular.

Moreover, an additional interview schedule based on Perlmutter's (1969) approaches to global staffing was used during the employers' interviews to distinguish between the organizational orientations of these MNCs. Analysis revealed that Bankco tended to favour a more polycentric orientation. It was staffed primarily by host-country nationals, operated as a quasi-independent subsidiary and was controlled by the central HQ primarily through good financial monitoring and procedures (Collings and Scullion 2006). Chemicalco, on the other hand, can be broadly categorized as a geocentric organization with an emphasis on global integration, cross-subsidiary communication, openness and a global corporate culture (Collings and Scullion 2006).

A total of 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide flexibility *and* a theoretical framework (Black and Champion 1976; Whipp 1998) within which the main research themes could be explored in greater detail (Rubin and Rubin 1995). The majority of the interviewees were male (97%) highlighting lower female participation in these two sectors specifically, and in full-time positions in the Pakistani managerial labour market in general. In Bankco, 24 interviews were conducted, including employees (21 interviews) and senior management (three interviews), across four different branches *and* the corporate head office within one major city of Pakistan. A total of 19 interviews were conducted in Chemicalco representing employer (five interviews) and employee (14 interviews) perspectives across different departments. Majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, within workplaces. Only eight telephone interviews were conducted in Chemicalco because some of the regional managers were geographically dispersed and it was not feasible to travel for one interview to each location.

Each interviewee was at least a graduate and a permanent employee with representative interviews conducted across different hierarchical levels *and* different functional areas. The

sample criteria led to a focus on a core group of professional, white-collar workers belonging to an elite social class, with shared educational backgrounds and social networks. Therefore, the degree of variation in career attitudes and work values was slightly restricted. Second, this group tended to be concentrated in the coveted and high-growth functional area of sales, forcing greater functional considerations such as accelerated career growth, specific skills set, and specific recruitment and selection criteria and so on. However, the focus on managerial employees can be justified because careers research has highlighted that middle-level professional employees/managers not only experience greater boundary crossing themselves but they also have to manage that experience for other employees (Granrose and Baccili 2005).

An inductive approach to analysis was taken by identifying overarching themes, and then ‘building theory’ by highlighting individual, organizational and institutional/societal influences on careers. In the light of the literature gaps previously discussed, inductive analysis was helpful in not only establishing the relationship between research and theory (Bryman and Bell 2003), but also in exploring the unique characteristics of careers in the organizations considered (Stake 1995) in the previously under-explored Pakistani setting. To enhance the validity of the results, the themes were cross-matched in both senior management and employees' interview transcripts and also corroborated with secondary data from company websites.

### **Boundaryless and protean careers: a new dawn or still an old day?**

Discussion of empirical findings will be divided into three parts. To highlight individual managers' career values and expectations, the first section will look at three broad themes: (1) the notion of increasing individual employability external to the employing organization; (2) individual responsibility for career development; and (3) the issue of international careers. In the following two sections I will consider the organizational and the societal/institutional contextual factors, respectively, to determine the *extent* to which these ‘new’ careers are influenced, inhibited and perhaps even contained by external influences.

### **Individual employees' career dynamics**

#### **Increasing employability external to the employing organization**

Individual employees actively sought to increase their employability and marketability in the ILMs and ELMs through building personal and professional contacts within the overall

industry; in line with Arthur and Rousseau's (1996) conceptualization of careers as valid and marketable outside the organization, and sustained by external networks. For instance, a personal banker at Bankco asserted that personal connections within and outside the banking industry helped every step of the way while a branch banking executive revealed that his portfolio of clients '80% is yes ... because of personal references and the *rest* are all those firms we had in our corporate portfolio and they were automatically transferred to me (by the bank)'. Employees felt that actively networking, both within and outside the organization, was instrumental not only with regards to their immediate performance evaluation, but also for their general know-how of the markets and its major players. Establishing contacts in itself is in line with the Pakistani societal practice of forming informal trust relations (particularly when endorsed by the social/family circle) but the end goal of increasing *individual* employability through these contacts is an interesting development.

A second sub-theme in relation to enhanced employability involved a well-developed employee awareness of the specific career advantages (present and future) accruing from work experience in these well-known MNCs. A lot of employees had purposefully sought work in these particular organizations to be associated with their 'brand name' in national and international labour markets. For instance, a relationship manager at Bankco argued that: the brand name naturally counts for a lot ... when people find out you are from Bankco they take notice ... because Bankco has a major influence on the industry ... there's a saying that there are only two kinds of bankers there are Bankco bankers and then there are ex-Bankco bankers.

Enhancing employability external to the organization was also evident in the training needs of the employees (see Table 1). For instance, an assistant brand manager at Chemicalco argued that on-the-job training in the organization was very high and created a highly transferable skills set that 'I guess you can use ... anywhere ... I would feel obviously a lot more confident now if I was to join another organization ... because these were things I didn't know before I joined Chemicalco ... that's an asset'. Several employees frequently referred to Bankco as a 'learning organization' and had made the conscious decision to work there (surprisingly despite lower financial rewards compared to local banks) because of the significant learning and training opportunities it offered. However, it was interesting to note that formal, organization specific, training on product/service information was less valued by the employees than general, informal or on-the-job training (ranging from time management to building and maintaining client relationships). This fits in with the 'new' careers approach

whereby employees prefer training that would contribute directly to their personal development and so positively enhance *overall* career development and career opportunities.

### **Individual responsibility for career development**

A second interesting issue pertaining to employees' career dynamics dealt with the increased focus on individual responsibility for career development. This was directly at odds with the more traditional, well-defined career ladders historically offered by employers (and still evident in many public- and private-sector organizations in Pakistan), but even more interesting within the developing country context where pervasive economic and political uncertainty (Abdullah, Boyle and Johan 2011) should act as strong barriers against individuals accepting responsibility for their careers.

Individual self-management of careers highlighted many related sub-themes also identified in King's (2003) study of graduates' career preferences. It was interesting to note that individual employees made concerted efforts to not only network, but also desired to take on extra responsibility beyond their specified job roles, improve visibility with seniors within the organization and actively pursue opportunities external to their employing company. For instance, a salaried accounts manager at Bankco explained that:

I'm thinking of moving to the telecom industry because of the financial crisis and the credit crisis we have in Pakistan at the moment. But telecom industry specifically is in boom at the moment and seems relatively less affected by the credit crunch.

Several respondents discussed how they had not taken up good job offers in other organizations because there was still a lot to learn in their current organizations, how they had moved between different sectors in the past based on sector growth, and how they would actively look for opportunities abroad when they felt 'the time is right'.

### **Mobility and international careers**

Based on the more flexible definition of boundaryless careers, a pertinent career issue in the context of MNCs would be international mobility (see Table 1). In Bankco, employees had a mixed attitude to international opportunities; they were aware that their organizational career development was likely to be limited to Pakistan and that the current financial conditions made it realistically even more difficult to have access to international opportunities in Bankco operations abroad. For instance, one employee argued that even though short-term visits were a likelihood, however, 'with regards to my current work it would probably finish at the national level'. However, they still had optimistic expectations of an eventual

international career, i.e. high psychological mobility, as a result of their work experience in Bankco.

In Chemicalco a more formal policy of international exposure across the organization's worldwide operations was observable for employees at all levels. Frequent workshops/conferences were held abroad where employees from across the region met for training and planning purposes. Similarly, there was ample opportunity to make visits to other subsidiaries for the purposes of greater interaction and cooperation, observation, learning and skills development. From an employee perspective international exposure was not only seen as a conduit to an eventual international assignment within the organization, but also more importantly considered essential for improving their individual performance and enhancing their resumes. For example, an assistant brand manager explicitly stated the individual advantages accruing to him as:

I've seen that the way I'm travelling and already dealing internationally, at my stage it's not that often in other companies ... most of our people started here as brand managers and now they are looking after Indonesia or Dubai...

A common theme across the two case studies was a similar *purpose of employment*. The majority of the employees had specifically sought employment in these particular foreign MNCs to improve their chances of an international career either within or outside their employing organization. Therefore, if organizations failed to provide international career transitions along traditional career ladders, many employees intended to harness their work experience in an MNC to try for self-initiated international experience. As a result, international career opportunities (both short and long term) were seen in very individualistic terms as improving overall skills and enhancing exposure. For instance, a relationship manager at Bankco felt that:

an international career is obviously more challenging ... you can learn a lot in the international industry ... multi-cultural environment that you find there ... the different economic trends ... a lot of opportunities to learn ... obviously I would welcome that...

### **The organizational context: structural and strategic influences on careers**

The preceding section considered some of the career attitudes espoused by the 'new' careers literature and it was interesting to note that these individualistic, boundary-crossing behaviours still seemed responsive to organizational influences. For example, employees'



desire to capitalize on the well-known reputation and ‘brand name’ of these MNCs was primarily because it offered them a lot of future career advantages in the ELM. However, senior management's implicit acceptance of individualistic career attitudes reflected organizational constraints rather than the ascendance of new work values and career attitudes, or the demise of the traditional career (Guest and Davey 1996; Jacoby 1999). Both organizations had very lean structures. In Bankco ‘as you climb up the corporate ladder the slots become fewer and fewer’ and Chemicalco ‘globally has a mindset of being a very lean company’. Therefore, rather than actively advocating a boundaryless approach, employers simply could not offer traditional, long-term, organizational careers. This raises an important issue regarding the boundaryless and protean concepts; have organizations adapted their policies and practices to reflect changed employee career attitudes or are individual employees' career decisions changing because of organizational constraints?

Similarly, while employees wanted more training that would enhance their employability in the ELM in line with the ‘new’ careers approach, they expected their employers to fulfil these training needs, an employee's expectation traditionally associated with organizational careers. This supports existing research that has highlighted the continued existence of features reminiscent of the ‘old’ organizational careers alongside boundaryless and protean attitudes (Granrose and Baccili 2005).

While Pakistani managers' willingness (and ability) to make and dictate inter-firm moves is reminiscent of boundaryless and protean career attitudes (assisted by their strong ELM position), existing literature argues that breaking free of all organizational hierarchies can rarely be realized. For instance, research shows that crossing other intra-organizational boundaries (between departments, functions and divisions) may have become progressively more difficult (Currie et al. 2006; Inkson 2006). In both the organizations there was an implicit functional hierarchy and employees, while able to contemplate individual careers outside these organizations, were unable to move out of their ‘functional chimneys’ (Butler et al. 2006; see Table 1). This was a significant issue because in both organizations upward mobility, and the pace of overall career progression, was tacitly tied to the functional department. For instance, in Bankco, branch banking and sales was seen as the fastest career path offered by the organization. A management trainee interviewed in Bankco, who had not made the decision of which department he eventually wanted to settle into, was very aware that:

it depends on the department ... the growth Bankco has in sales ... no other bank comes near it by far ... you can be a VP (Vice President) in 4–5 years time having started as a contractual employee...

Therefore, while employees were responsible for their career development the organizations' structural, departmental set-ups were responsible for limiting the overall scope of these individually determined careers. Individual employees' movement out of their employing organizations was sometimes easier than negotiating a cross-departmental shift.

In expanding on this issue of mobility and linking it specifically to international careers, the significance of several organizational determinants became evident. While employees in both organizations were equally keen to have international careers, the possibility of realizing this form of mobility within their employing organization was dependent on the organizational structure and strategic orientation of the subsidiary. Bankco Pakistan favoured a polycentric orientation (Perlmutter 1969) and this structural set-up (which one branch manager described as: 'Pakistan is a very small part of Bankco group all over the world') meant that the ILM for its employees was restricted to Pakistan alone and international career opportunities in international subsidiaries were rare. Chemicalco Pakistan, on the other hand, had a more geocentric profile and seemed one of several international sub-units that was neither centralized nor completely decentralized, for as the regional HR manager observed: there are certain I think company driven corporate policies and philosophies ... irrespective of where you are (they) trump ... then there's another slew of policies which is more driven by the country laws and the country requirements ... so they both run kind of in parallel.

Chemicalco's policy of communication, integration and a common corporate culture meant that not only were there regular international visits, but more permanent transfers were also possible; with frequently cited examples of employees from Pakistan who had been relocated to the HQ and other subsidiaries. Therefore, the majority of the employees interviewed wished to internationalize their careers, thereby enhancing their long-term employability through varied exposure and work experiences. However, whether their employing organizations could provide them with these desired opportunities ultimately depended not on the employees' changed perceptions or their potential but on organizational structures and strategic constraints.

### **The societal and institutional influences: careers in the context of Pakistan**

Career structures depend not only on individual employees' career attitudes or MNCs' organizational structures, but also on the specific institutional and societal context. Discussion of this context is organized around DiMaggio and Powell's (1983, cited in Farndale and Paauwe 2007) ideas of institutional and competitive isomorphism, i.e. exploring institutional and societal structures as well as the varying significance/competitiveness of different industries and sectors in Pakistan.

The institutional impact of Pakistan's external business environment (i.e. the size, significance and degree of competition characterizing different industries/sectors) was evident in the international career opportunities offered by the two MNCs. Pakistan's financial markets are relatively underdeveloped and only a limited range of financial products and services can be offered to Pakistani consumers. Therefore, Bankco Pakistan was a fairly small concern (in terms of market size and portfolio of products and services) and its employees were not strategically important within the MNC's international operations. As a result Pakistani managerial employees' chances of being offered international transfers were fairly limited. On the other hand, the country has a large primary sector and Chemicalco Pakistan controlled a very large market share of the agro-chemicals industry specifically, as well as supplying raw materials to the MNC's global supply chain. Since Chemicalco's Pakistani employees were dealing with a larger market, generating significant revenues for the MNC and therefore, enjoyed a higher status within the company's global concerns, they were serious contenders for global expatriate positions. Thus, while employees' desire to achieve increased mobility through international careers was consistent across both organizations, the ability to realize these aspirations was constrained by Pakistan's overall business environment and its impact on the MNCs operational set-up and size.

Several societal influences on career attitudes were also evident. Khilji's (2004) conceptualization of the duality of values, whereby modern, Western values were present alongside Pakistani, traditional values, was pertinent to both organizations. In many cases employees accepted and approved of individually based performance measures (such as performance appraisals, individual bonuses, meritocratic career progression, accelerated career paths, etc.) because of perceived advantages on individual careers. For instance, the deputy finance manager at Chemicalco stated that 'the entire bonus is based on individual performance' and promotion depended '100% ... on performance ... no other criteria'. However, this individualism was negotiated in a very Pakistani way. Employee's career expectations were based on individual performance indicators, but this largely Western

concept was supplemented with the traditional practice of social networks (Whitley 2007) and commitment to more immediate social in-groups (Khilji 2001; Reade 2001). Therefore, while there was evidence of commitment to the employer (i.e. the out-group) and acceptance of foreign HR practices, there was greater psychological commitment to smaller social groups predicated on personal relationships (even if with work colleagues). Many employees felt that, despite the importance of individual performance indicators, personal relationships at work could sometimes positively influence career development. For instance, the assistant safety and administration manager at Chemicalco admitted that apart from performance his 'interaction with higher management' had also influenced his recent promotion. Similarly, a relationship manager within corporate banking at Bankco openly acknowledged that: it's not *just* merit ... there have been instances where people have had a tiff with their manager and not gotten promoted. There have also been instances where people were known to be not good performers but they still got promoted.

The Vice President at Bankco argued that 'there is a career path ... (and) it's quite ... performance driven' but at the same time held steadfast to the Pakistani, traditional ideals of loyalty and solidarity by saying:

in Pakistan we would rather have our leg cut than fire someone ... culture ... nothing to do with the person ... I would fight tooth and nail if anybody comes and even talks about it ... people would rather not fire ... they will probably get him a job somewhere else rather than fire...

Finally, despite individual employees exhibiting distinct tendencies to forge individual, mobile, boundaryless, subjectively determined careers, this process was ultimately negotiated within a very specific social set-up. Khilji's (2001, 2003a,b, 2004) research on Pakistan has underlined the prevailing and pervasive class distinctions, the disparity between the elite and the non-elite, and the impact of this elitism on organizations. My own research also highlighted elements of Pakistan's elitist culture (see Table 1). At the organizational level, there was an implicit preference for business graduates from either the country's top business schools or with foreign qualifications, and prior relevant work experience in an MNC. While these recruitment and selection criteria were classified as ideal characteristics in potential candidates, they serve to highlight the underlying desire to recruit candidates belonging to a specific social stratum.

These implicit elitist manifestations also seemed to have infiltrated functional hierarchies whereby certain departments (such as the marketing or sales divisions) have more *image importance* compared to others (such as HR, operations, IT and general administration). Therefore, any boundarylessness exhibited through interdepartmental and functional mobility was directly tied in with an implicit social hierarchy of different departments. For example, in Bankco a shift from a back end, support department to front-end sales area was considered as organizational *and* social progression. Similarly, a gold executive banker who had moved into sales and liabilities from the IT department was very clear in having made a move for the better:

initially I was in IT in Bankco ... people had been in that department for years without getting promoted and so I decided to get out of that and get in the service side of it. Because this is where you can grow...

Moreover, movement in the opposite direction, i.e. out of sales, was categorized as functional mobility, but regarded implicitly as downward mobility. This coexistence of modern, individualistic, Western values and traditional, collectivist and elitist ideals in foreign MNCs, and their impact on the delicate balance between individualist career goals and aspirations and collective norms, and the importance of social connections serves to highlight the social and institutional impact of a distinctly Pakistani context.

## **Conclusion**

Managerial career development in the specific context of American MNCs operating in Pakistan highlighted several dualities. First, there *was* evidence of certain aspects of ‘new’ careers such as individualized employment contracts, career self-management, increasing employability external to the organization and greater willingness to cross different boundaries. However, these new career concepts were often tempered by organizational factors such as the MNC's host-country set-up in relation to the overall global operations and structural and financial constraints (such as limited senior positions and limited resources to employ people) that often made inter-organizational mobility a necessity rather than a choice. This highlighted the first duality of the coexistence of ‘new’ and traditional organizational careers features. That is, boundaryless and protean career attitudes were ultimately played out within organizational confines. Therefore, it would make more sense to see these ‘new’ careers not as rendering traditional careers and boundaries completely irrelevant but rather as signifying shifted redrawn allegiances in the workplace.

Second, the impact of globalizing forces (such as the exchange of information and technologies, the presence of MNCs and generational differences in normative values) on the education system, organizational structures and societal arrangements in Pakistan may have created a small pocket of educated, elite knowledge workers with dual institutional identities. These dual identities highlighted the centrifugal forces of modern versus traditional values and individualism versus collectivism. Therefore, on the one hand, managerial employees identified with the global organizational policies of their employing MNC (Reade 2001) by embracing increased autonomy and a more contingent form of job security (firmly tied to individual performance). On the other hand, the specific institutional context ensured the continued importance of social connections, networking and elitism reminiscent of traditional Pakistani values. There is evidence to suggest that foreign influences and economic restructuring have affected a similar process of institutional change in other Asian economies as well (Rowley, Poon, Zhu and Warner 2011). More importantly, this is a two-way process of change because MNCs also need to respond to these dualities and social transformations by being flexible over which practices they choose to transfer and in what form these practices are eventually implemented in developing host contexts (Vo 2009).

What are the wider implications of these contradictions for the study and practice of international HRM? At the subsidiary level individual employees' increasing ability and desire to adopt foreign HR ideals, such as the 'new' career concepts, make them suitable third-country alternatives for international assignments. This shift away from traditional home-country expatriate managers not only creates additional career opportunities for mobile managers from developing economies, but could also create labour advantages for MNCs in their international ILMs. First, it opens up the relatively untapped emerging economies' labour markets for developing the critical resource of global leaders and managers. Second, the organizational objective of cross-border coordination and control is often achieved through socialization and the deployment of informal networks (Reiche and Harzing 2011). In the context of developing/emerging economies, this informal relationship-building may be achieved more effectively by deploying managers from similar markets because they are in the unique position of transferring foreign corporate policies and practices while remaining culturally sensitive to what Rowley et al. identify as shared traditional Asian values such as 'emphasis on hard work, respect for elders, strong family ties and passion for learning' (2011, p. 172). Most importantly, this shift in MNCs sourcing increasingly mobile managerial talent from developing rather than developed host countries can have

significant *regional* implications. In line with global talent management's advocacy of a regio-centric approach, it makes sense to tailor international HRM activities according to specific geographical regions (Tarique and Schuler 2010). Moreover, there is strategic and practical value in MNCs capitalizing on the 'availability of near-nationals' and employing third-country nationals within the same or proximal regional labour markets (Reiche and Harzing 2011).

This study reveals that features of 'new' and traditional careers coexist, reflecting both organizational constraints as well the duality of values evident in developing economies such as Pakistan. Individually driven career management and greater boundary-crossing can have negative (e.g. talent wars and job-hopping) and positive (i.e. diverse global leadership and alternate international assignments) implications for MNCs specifically. How individual managerial employees and MNCs (in developing economies in particular) respond to these evolving career concepts, organizational structures and institutional environments can have wide-ranging implications at the individual, organizational and institutional levels – with possible spillover effects on regional labour dynamics as well.

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## Notes

1. 44.96% of the total employed population is based within the agriculture sector and 55.04% in the non-agricultural sector out of which only 14.69% are based in the formal sector (i.e. engaged in full-time wage employment). Out of this 14.69%, the majority are employed in craft and related trades (23.61%) and unskilled occupations (33.01%) and legislators senior officials and managers account for only 3.82% while professionals amount to 4.03%. (Labour Force Survey 2009–2010).
2. Three of the most popular private universities that cater to the urban elite are: Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi was set up in the 1970s with financial and academic assistance from Wharton Business School; Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore was established in the late 1980s (with the

help of US aid) and strongly influenced by McGill University and Harvard Business School; and University College Lahore (UCL) is a foreign affiliate centre for the University of London's international programmes.

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